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ABSTRACT

This digest examines the role of adult career counselors in working with three new types of clients: (1) older adults looking for post-retirement careers; (2) displaced workers; and (3) dual career couples. It also considers the role of career counselors in providing career development programs at the worksite. Additional skills needed by counselors to function effectively in these new roles are discussed. (NB)

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HIGHLIGHTS ...An ERIC/CAPS Digest

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Adult Career Counseling -- New Clienteles

Introduction

Adult career counselors have traditionally dealt with the concerns of re-entry women or employed men and women who are questioning the direction of their current occupation and looking for possible career alternatives. However, other groups of people now appear frequently in the adult career counselor's office: *older adults* who are looking for post-retirement careers; *displaced workers*, both white and blue collar, whose jobs have been eliminated through such events as plant closings, farm foreclosures, and business mergers or failures; and *dual-career couples* whose needs are more complex than those of an individual doing career exploration.

Another trend is the movement of career planning into the corporate setting as businesses and other organizations begin to offer counseling and career planning at the work site. Since keeping abreast of changes in occupational trends and labor market projections is an important component of a career counseling program (Zunker, 1981) another important development is the use of computers, which provide both interactive guidance programs and up-to-date occupational information.

All of these trends necessitate expansion of the adult career counselor's skills, knowledge base, and roles.

Older Adults

Adults who require retirement counseling are often seeking full- or part-time careers. Those who wish to find part-time work are usually trying to make ends meet or hoping to fulfill personal needs such as the desire to contribute to society or the need for affiliation (Kurs, 1980). Goals of retirement education may include:

1. a positive attitude toward retirement and potential for continued success and growth,
2. a personal plan for retirement,
3. planning, decision-making, and interpersonal communication skills,
4. a deeper awareness of having control over one's own future (Stone & Penman, 1988).

Retirement planning has traditionally focused on financial planning. Many newer programs also include the interpersonal or lifestyle aspects of adjusting to retirement. Retirement specialists must add to their counseling repertoire an understanding of career development for the increasing numbers of older clients who wish another career; and they must add an understanding of the aging process as well as of key retirement issues.

Displaced Workers

Large numbers of displaced workers are facing decisions about new careers and confronting a job search for the first time in their lives. Many of these people moved into their previous work without much conscious thought, and find themselves ill equipped to plan and develop new work lives (Ashley, 1986). In addition, family resistance to change may further disrupt a workers' abilities to take action on his/her own behalf (Lutz & Weeks, 1985). Counselors need to target their strategies to the different psychological stages experienced by most displaced workers. According to Greenwood (1987), "Stage three, when the dislocated worker is actively seeking a job, is the true 'in-transition' time and emotional support is critical. If jobs are not found quickly, apathy, frustration, disillusionment and deep depression are likely to set in."

Amundson & Borgen (1982) focus on the intervention strategies appropriate for the three stages of the unemployment cycle. Loss and search interventions can include: (a) understanding clients' feelings and challenging them to view their job loss from different perspectives, (b) assisting in the resolution of conflicts related to the loss, (c) developing a realistic view of skills and strengths, (d) evaluating with clients their options and job search approaches, (e) continuing to support clients, (f) developing specific action plans, and (g) practicing necessary skills for implementing the plans. Burnout strategies should include validating client feelings, building self concept, and identifying new approaches to the job search.

Dual Career Couples

Increasingly career counselors are being sought by dual-career couples who have complex career planning issues because of their interdependence. In the past career planning has been viewed as an individual activity, but for both men and women in dual-career relationships career decisions cannot be made without taking into consideration the connection between work and family roles. Consequently, both spouses must be involved in the career counseling process to deal with the issues of balancing roles and demands, juggling responsibilities, and the careful planning of career transitions (Hazard & Kozlow, 1985; Miller, 1985).

The adult career counselor must be aware of the career, gender role, and marriage-family dilemmas of couples in career transitions who are experiencing the stress and conflict which accompany disequilibrium (O'Neil, 1986). The career counselor who works with dual-career couples

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must understand the developmental stage of: (a) each career in the family, (b) the "couple" relationship, and (c) the family (Miller, 1985).

Career Planning at the Work Site

In the past, career counseling programs for adults have been delivered in academic institutions, community agencies, and private offices. The workplace is now emerging as an additional setting for these services. Profit and non-profit sectors realize the benefit of conserving both human and financial assets and of saving recruitment, training, and outplacement costs. Career assistance is being provided not only for people these organizations plan to terminate, but also for those they want to keep, e.g., valuable employees who are dissatisfied or people whose productivity has slipped for a variety of reasons but whom the organization wants to keep (Kleiman, 1985).

Providing career counseling in the workplace also allows individual employees to improve their job classification and become aware of career path opportunities within the organization. Additionally, it aids an employer in improving employee relations and productivity (Zunker, 1981). The better placed an employee is, the greater his or her satisfaction.

Career development assistance is being provided by outside career counselor consultants hired by an organization, career development specialists who are members of an organization's human resources team, or managers within the organization who have been trained in career pathing and monitoring. Zunker proposes that these programs should include:

1. experience, skills and interest identification;
2. values and needs clarification;
3. education/training, occupational and life planning.

As in other trend areas, providing career development programs at the work site demands additional skills of the counselor -- particularly expertise borrowed from human resource management and training and development. The career development specialist in the workplace must also possess knowledge and skills in the following areas:

1. adult learning and development,
2. training program design,
3. group facilitation,
4. consulting skills (Chalofsky & Gerstein, 1985).

The major concern of counselors providing services in academic or community settings is with the needs and goals of the individual. The counselor providing these same services in the work site must often take into consideration the needs of the organization as well. This may require redefinition of the counselor's role and increased emphasis on counselor ethics.

Summary

Responding to the needs of these "new" clienteles does indeed call for a redefinition of the counselor's role. Counselors must expand their knowledge in the areas of career and adult development as well as family roles. They must increase their information about the world of work and referral resources. They must continue to be aware that older adults, displaced workers, and dual-career couples have needs that differ from the needs of traditional adult clients. They must be prepared to develop and deliver career development programs at the work site. And they must be able to use, understand and evaluate computer programs that serve as aids to career counseling.

Resource Documents

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